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The Sad Story of
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The Sad Story
of the
Reddens

by

DR. H. C. BURLEIGH



THE REDDEN FAMILY OF VERMONT

Many thousands of persons have enjoyed brief holidays along the highways and byways of the State of Vermont and many of us still look forward to further visits in the years to come. I can also safely say that those who have never visited Vermont do not know what they are missing.

There are many unforgettable features to be seen in Vermont, -- rugged forested hills, deep valleys, quiet villages and rushing streams. And to add to its attractiveness, particularly to Canadians, this is the land that gave us so many of our Loyalist ancestors, not only here along the Bay of Quinte, but also along the Upper St. Lawrence and in the Eastern Townships of Quebec. Among these, our ancestors, we find the names of many true and determined persons, such as Robert Perry, David Shorey, Daniel Walker, Elijah Osborn, Isaac Brisco, Jeprha Hawley, Justus and Samuel Sherwood, Hazelton Spencer, Oliver Church, William Fairfield, David and James Breakenridge, Gershom French, William Marsh, Ebenezer Washburn, John Peters, father and son, James Rogers, Jonathan Wickwire, Daniel and Benjamin Wing, Henry and Peter Young, and many others, who became the pioneer settlers of our homeland.

To those who have an urge to visit Vermont, I can recommend that they do so early in October. At that time of the year you will be overwhelmed by the blaze of autumn colours spread across the hills, the turbulent mountain streams, the occasional covered bridges, and the shaded country turnpikes, as well as the congenial residents. By that time of the year the summer traffic will be diminished, motels will still be available, and at a lower rate. But, what is more interesting, the museums will still be open for your inspection.

My first trip to Vermont was almost forty years ago. From the battlefield of Saratoga and Schuylerville, I crossed the Hudson River to Greenwich. From there I took the winding road down the hills to Cambridge and the Owl Kill Valley. Then down the valley to the Walloomsac River and along its bank to the town or village of Bennington. It was along this same route that Baum's Chasseurs and Peters' Queen's Loyal Rangers proceeded to their defeat at the Battle of Bennington in August, 1777. After the battle, some two hundred prisoners, bound in pairs by bed-cords, were marched, like cattle, from the battlefield to Bennington, ridiculed and abused by their erstwhile friends and neighbours. It is also on record that, during the following winter, these same prisoners, tied together as before, were forced to break a road through the deep snow a matter of twenty miles over the hills to Wilmington and return to Bennington the same day.

While in Bennington I visited the well-known museum, to which I have returned whenever in Vermont. Even as I did in May 1974, this time accompanied by forty friends and neighbours. We were on a visit to the land of our forefathers, but we also wished to pay our respects to the remains of a good Loyalist, David Redding. We disembarked from our bus and entered the museum. Then someone asked to see the bones of David Redding. After an exhibit of some embarrassment, we soon had circled about an open drawer where lay the bones we wished to view, the last remains of a good Loyalist who had been deprived a decent Christian burial for almost two centuries.

And who, you might ask, was David Redding? I had the answer on my first trip when I bought a booklet in the Museum, entitled, "The Story of David Redding Who Was Hanged," which had been written by Mr. John Spargo, the curator of the Museum at the time. I had a lengthy talk with Mr. Spargo, and later had corresponded with him on the subject.

Mr. Spargo, in his booklet, related the fact that in 1927, the Museum received a box containing these bones. There was a bit of information about them, but being a seeker for details, he spent years investigating, and his booklet told his story of prolonged search. As he tells it:

"One day in the early part of 1927 a communication was received from Judge Clarence M. Smith, of Williamstown, a lineal descendant of General William Towner. In his communication Judge Smith said that he was in possession of the complete skeleton of David Redding, which had come to him by inheritance, having been in possession of the family ever since General William Towner received it as a gift from his friend Jonas Fay. Judge Smith said that he felt that the Historical Museum in Bennington was the proper repository for Redding's bones.

Museum curators are accustomed to unusual offers and to facing difficult and sometimes embarrassing, problems arising out of such offers. Although I could not imagine with any measure of comfort a human skeleton displayed in a glass case in a small museum open to the general public, I accepted the offer of the skeleton on general principles. After all, almost a hundred and fifty years had passed, during which time the bones had been subject to the vicissitudes of human fortunes and judgments. There need be no great hurry, therefore, in deciding what to do with the skeleton. So, in due course, Judge Smith brought the bones back to Bennington in a small, sturdily built trunk made of oak, which he said was the one in which the bones were originally taken to Williamstown, according to a family tradition. All the bones were in the little trunk, said the Judge, but a few extra ones had been added and he did not know which they were!

The skeleton formerly had been articulated and mounted in the customary fashion. But 'the children used to play with it, just as if it were a toy,' and a small girl delighted in taking it apart and reassembling it! Something over a year after the bones came into my custody, I decided that instead of keeping them in a drawer and showing them to all whose curiosity prompted them to request it, a better course would be to build a small tomb inside the enclosed yard of the museum and to place the bones of Redding in a hermetically sealed box inside the tomb. Upon either a marble slab or a bronze tablet I proposed to tell briefly the story of the man whose mortal remains were so entombed.

When I submitted my plan to several friends, I was astonished by the vigor and warmth of their antagonism. One assailed my plan with some bitterness. My suggestion was "shameful"; and if I attempted to carry it into effect, I ought to be removed from my position and denied the right to hold any responsible office or post in any historical body in Vermont! that it would not be understood, people being sure to believe that we were "honoring a traitor and spy."

The answer to the query, "Who was Redding?" remained a puzzle and a challenge to Mr. Spargo. For twenty years thereafter, it was an obsession to one of his questioning mind. His pamphlet reveals his trials, disappointments and satisfaction in his belief that the hanging of David Redding was a grave error on the part of the founders of the State of Vermont.

To understand the tangle of emotions, conflicts and antagonisms which could engender a state of mind in which hanging for any reason could be considered a gala event, a cause for cheers and huzzas, particularly here amid the Green Mountains, it is necessary to go back in history to the early days of the seventeenth century. During this period in our history the French occupied the St. Lawrence Valley and the Great Lakes, while the English dominated the Atlantic Seaboard communities. Between these two belligerent peoples there was a vast no-man's land covering what is now northern New York, Vermont and northern New Hampshire. Except for a few forts guarding the main waterways, the wilderness belonged to the wild-life and to the occasional war party, issuing from the depths of the forest in sudden, savage onset, with scalping, murder, abduction and arson.

All this came to an end at the Battle of Quebec, in 1759, and the signing of the peace four years later. Now that peace had come to the tortured land, settlements began to spring up in the no-man's land. By 1763, New Hampshire, which claimed all the land as far west as the western limits of Massachusetts, had established 138 towns (townships to us). In 1764, New York made a claim to the area west of the Connecticut River, and made an appeal to the British Crown. When the decision favoured New York, apprehension spread through the newly formed towns. New York proceeded to re-divide the land to their liking. Those already settled were asked to re-purchase their lands and make their peace with the New York authorities. The

settlers, on the whole, full of resentment, refused. Led by the Green Mountain Boys, there developed armed strife which continued for ten years.

The disturbances in the Green Mountains were further complicated by the onset of the American Revolution in 1775. The Green Mountain Boys now had two enemies, the tories from their own ranks who joined the British forces, as well as their immediate enemies, the New Yorkers. By their capture of Fort Ticonderoga, in 1775, they were able to show the New Yorkers that they could take care of themselves with a boldness not yet exhibited elsewhere. They also proved in 1777, when Burgoyne advanced up Lake Champlain, that they could defend their territory from any enemy, as they did in the Battle of Bennington. In the same year the Vermonters declared their neighbours. They now declared that they could be as bold as the people in Albany. This was the backdrop of affairs which clouded Mr. Spargo's attempt to discover the truth of the events dealing with the hanging of David Redding. With a knowledge of the past it is so much easier to follow Mr. Spargo, as he reveals to us the result of twenty years of investigation.

"This event is a part of the folklore of the Green Mountain State, yet, strangely enough, no single event of interest or importance in the history of the state is so completely shrouded in mystery. Of none is there such a dearth of precise and authentic detailed information. The records of the two trials seem to have disappeared very soon after Redding was executed As we shall see in the course of this study, there was much that those responsible for the conviction and execution of Redding had good and weighty reasons for concealing; there is good reason, therefore, for believing that the disappearance of the records was not accidental, but was deliberately caused, in order to destroy the evidence of lawlessness committed in the name of law and orderly judicial process."

Mr. Spargo apparently left no stone unturned in his search for details. His search involved the record books of Vermont and of neighbouring states in New England and New York, as well as the many records available in Washington, D.C. Appeals were also made to the Public Record Office in London, England as well as in New Brunswick and in Ottawa. What limited information was uncovered supplemented the early histories of Vermont, the earliest published in 1823, which added word of mouth recollections of early residents. The results of Mr. Spargo's investigation can be summed up, as follows:

David Redding was a Tory or Loyalist, as was Francis Redding, evidently his brother. Both had served as soldiers in Lt. Col. John Peter's Queen's Loyal Rangers in the disastrous campaign led by General Burgoyne. Both were present at the battles of Bennington and Saratoga; and both, it would appear, escaped being involved in the surrender of Burgoyne's Army. The next reference is that of the arrest of David and Edward Redding by the Albany Committee of Safety. (Mr. Spargo suspected that David and Edward were brothers). This must have occurred in March or April of 1778. As there is no further record of them, it is assumed that they escaped from the Albany Jail. It is possible that David Redding had fled to the Bennington area after his escape and where he was arrested. The Albany Committee, hearing that his arrest had been made in Bennington, directed a letter to Bennington on April 21st, requesting that the prisoner be returned to Albany for trial for the theft of a horse in Dutchess County from one Simmons. Some time thereafter, possibly in early May, Redding, under guard, was dispatched on the road to Albany. Somewhere along the road, near Hoosic, about ten miles west of Bennington, Redding seized the gun of one of the guards and made his escape, it being assumed that he wished to seek assistance from the many Tory sympathizers in that neighbourhood. He was re-arrested very soon, and his guard returned to Bennington with their prisoner. While the authorities in Bennington were debating their next move, there came word from Albany that two hangings had occurred there, and that, on May 19, a mass trial had taken place and several more hangings were made. It would then appear that the newly formed State of Vermont, perhaps from jealousy, decided that if New York could hang persons, so could Vermont. Then followed the trial of Redding, apparently on June 4th, before five judges and a jury of six persons, he being accused of enimical conduct, whatever that means. He was found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged two days later, on June 6th, 1778.

Before the hanging was accomplished, John Burnham, a local merchant who had acquired some knowledge of law and legal principles by self-directed study, and who had served his neighbours in a legal capacity, broadcast his opinion that the trial of Redding had been illegal, since he had been tried before a jury of six persons instead of twelve, according to British law. As a result, a new trial was ordered.

On the 6th of June, the day on which Redding was to have been hanged, a large crowd gathered in Bennington, not knowing that the hanging had been postponed. As time passed and nothing had happened, the crowd became unruly and angry, resenting the fact that they were being deprived of a chance to witness the hanging of a dangerous criminal, who, it appeared was being allowed to escape.

It was then that Ethan Allen, recently returned to Bennington after two years imprisonment in England and New York, climbed atop a stump and addressed the multitude, stating the reasons for a week's delay in the hanging. He ended by saying, "you shall see someone hanged at all events for if Redding is not then hung, I will be hung myself." The crowd, satisfied with this explanation, burst out in cheers and then quietly dispersed.

The re-trial took place on June 9th, with twelve jurors. The conviction, naturally, was upheld, and the sentence was carried out two days later. Mr. Spargo described the event in these words:

"Redding mounted the scaffold, the noose was placed around his neck. If there was no formal and audible prayer, we may be sure that from some hearts the traditional prayer, 'God have mercy upon his soul! 'ascended to Heaven. Then, as two o'clock was announced, Sheriff Fay ordered the trap sprung. There was a brief moment when the silence was broken only by the sighs of men and women and the sounds made by field beasts and the birds overhead. Then came an outburst of noise, a terrible cacophony in which the cries of hysterical sobbing women and the exultant shoutings of blood-lusted men mingled in a dissonance of blasphemy, while the distorted body of a man dangled at the end of a rope, swaying in the afternoon breeze. If Ethan Allen was among those present, could he have looked at the dangling, grimacing thing? Probably not. He must have looked down, I think, for surely he could not then look upward to the sky!"

It was thus that David Redding passed to the Great Beyond. Not even in death could his body find peace in the breast of Mother Earth. Instead, it was given to Dr. Jonas Fay, a brother of the Sheriff, who wanted it to increase his anatomical knowledge. With lye and quick lime the flesh was removed from the bones, and the skeleton of Redding proved to be an impressive decoration for a long time in Doctor Fay's office. But otherwise it was of little use to the Doctor, as he could not articulate it properly. He was like one who is baffled by a jig-saw puzzle. There were always a few pieces left over.

Fay's inability to re-assemble Redding's bones in proper order became well known to Vermonters. Years later it was related that old ladies in Bennington gathered around the Kitchen fire, expressed their disapproval of the execution and held the belief that Doctor Fay's failure to make Redding's bones "come together right" was a sign of Divine displeasure or at least that wickedness had been done.

Finally, in desperation Doctor Fay presented the skeleton to his friend, General William Towner, a practising physician in Williamstown, Mass. Doctor Towner was more successful than Doctor Fay in assembling Redding's skeleton. For three generations the skeleton was used by the Towner family doctors for demonstration to medical students in Williamstown Medical School. Then, in 1927, as noted earlier, it was returned to Bennington where it is now on exhibition to all who express a desire to see it.

In closing, I wish to say that it was an honor to have met Doctor Spargo, even though very briefly. I have learned to respect him for his determined research, for his sympathy for one so unfairly accused, and for his choice of words in bringing to us the story of David Redding. Nothing would be more apt than to quote the final paragraph of the chapter entitled "The Trials and Execution." It should leave us with an added respect for the author.

It is impossible for any Vermonter to read what accounts we have of the execution of David Redding with complete approval and satisfaction. Without any sentimental idealisation of Redding, it is clearly evident that he was not a common malefactor, but a soldier. Death by hanging might have been decreed by a court martial, just as Nathan Hale was hung by order of a British court martial and Major Andre by order of an American court martial. In that case the hanging would have been in the presence of the military forces immediately available to the commanding officer. That would have been a dignified proceeding, vastly different from the humiliation of a brave and unfortunate soldier by making his execution a spectacle for jeering crowds. The Vermonter of today cannot regard the 'trials' of David Redding as anything better than a discreditable travesty of justice, or refrain from regretting the ugly blots it has made upon the records of the pioneer founders of the Green Mountains' State and of its famous champion and leader, Ethan Allen."

POSTSCRIPT

A casual perusal of Mr. Spargo's story of the brief, unhappy life of David Redding would convince the average reader that the author had left no stone unturned in his efforts to find the truth. Mr. Spargo, however, does admit that he failed to uncover any details of the Redding Family. He ends with these words:

"Upon the whole, it now seems to me that information concerning the family and antecedents of David Redding is more likely to follow the publication of the story in

this study thus far, than as a result of further enquiry by me."

He was right. Among the numerous notes which I had made over the past thirty years from the many records available and having to do with the Hudson Valley in New York and Vermont, as well as Canada, I found these records of the Redding (Redden, Ridden, Riddon) family.

1. Dutch Reformed Church, Poughkeepsie, Dutchess County.

Marriages:

1753, Cot. 2 Edward Redden, young man, born in Yoland, living in Poughkeepsie
Jacoba Lewis, young woman, born and living in Poughkeepsie.

2. Trinity Church, Albany, New York.

Baptisms:

1756, May 9, Mary, daughter of Edward Redden and Jacoba Lewis

3. Dutch Reformed Church, Schaghticoke, Rensselaer County, New York.

Marriages:

1774, May 1, Jorge Fisher and Mary Redden.

1779, Oct. 10, John Young and Elizabeth Riddin.

Baptisms:

1775, Frederick F., son of George Fisher and Polly Ridden.

4. War Office Papers, Public Archives, Ottawa, Ontario.

Muster Roll, 2nd Battalion, King's Royal Reg.t., New York, 24 Jan., 1783

Francis Redding, born in America, aged 23, 5'7", Loyalist, 7 yrs. service.

It is safe to assume that the above items refer to the family of David Redding. We already know that Edward and David were imprisoned in Albany early in 1778. Mr. Spargo assumed that they were brothers. It is more likely that they were father and son. Edward and Jacoba, following marriage in Poughkeepsie in 1753, removed to the Albany area, finally settling in the Hoosac region. Known children were:

1. David, likely born in 1754-5, was the first child. He was, therefore, 23 or 24 years of age when he was hanged.
2. Mary, born in 1756, second child, married George Fisher, who also served in the Queen's Loyal Rangers with the Reddings.
3. Francis, born in 1759, also joined the Loyal Rangers in 1777, at the age of 18. He escaped to Canada after the surrender at Saratoga and remained in the service until December, 1783. He finally became a settler in Ernestown, where some of his descendants still reside.

4. Elizabeth, born about 1761, likely fourth child. She married John Young of the Young family of that community who were progenitors of the several Youngs who settled in Fredericksburgh in 1784. One of this family was the ancestor of Maurice Young, an early President of our Branch.

It should come as no surprise that David Redding tried to escape from the guards in the Hoosac area. Not only was his home nearby, but Hoosac was long known as a Tory hotbed. Here, it would have been easy to find aid, once he had eluded his guard. Among those to whom he might have turned were families who later became settlers in the Bay of Quinte region, such as Dafoe, Lake, Parrott, Young, Hogle, Redden, Lucas, Keller, Best, Ruiter and Jones.

I wish to bring this paper to a close by quoting from the Vermont Papers an item which appears to have escaped the eye of Mr. Spargo. I found it in the record room of the State Capital at Montpelier, Vermont. It appears in

Vermont State Papers, Vol. 1, 1775-1779
Bennington, March, 1779

"Voted that the Judges of the Special Court be allowed 2 Dollars per day for the Trial of David Redden who was Executed in this place in June last."

That ends the sad story of David Redding.

POST POSTSCRIPT

But, what of David Redding's Siblings - - Mary, Francis, Elizabeth and what of his parents? How did they bear up, following the tragic end of their brother and son?

Francis Redden, his brother, as the surname is spelled in Canada, is said to have been born in 1759, if we can rely on a statement in the Haldimand Papers, found in the Public Archives in Ottawa. Here, it is stated in a Muster Roll of Sir John Johnson's Second Battalion of the King's Royal Regiment of New York, under date of January, 1783, that Francis was 23 years of age, 5'7" in height, born in America, and had served in the Armed Forces for four years before being enrolled in the second battalion on 12 November, 1781.

It is also recorded in these same documents that David and Francis had enlisted in Col. John Peter's Queen's Royal Rangers in July, 1777. They were evidently with their regiment at the battle of Bennington in August, of that year, and at the battle of Saratoga in the following month. Francis appears to have gone to Canada with his regiment, following the Convention of Saratoga, in October. Here he continued in Service until the end of the War. David, and his father, Edward, must have remained in New York Province. There is evidence that both had been briefly detained in Albany for having been with the enemy, but were released under bond. Francis is recorded as being with his regiment at Lachine, Que., in January, 1778, and at Isle Aux Noix in April.

It is well-known that during the years after Burgoyne's defeat, the Tory, or American members of his army were allowed to retreat to Canada, but were not to bear arms during the

remaining years of the war. Then, in the summer of 1781, when the rebels had broken the terms of the 1777 Convention, the Tory soldiers were reformed once more into regiments. It was then that Francis became a drummer in the newly-formed Second Battalion of the King's Royal Regiment of New York, which he had joined on 12 November, 1781. He likely accompanied the battalion when it became the garrison at Oswego. He must have been present when, in August, 1783, it was removed to Cataraqui to prepare for arrival of the refugee Loyalists to the Bay of Quinte in the following summer.

Somewhere along the line, Francis married Elizabeth, the daughter of Simon Snider, also a Loyalist soldier from Saratoga, New York, Francis and his bride settled in Ernesttown Township. Here they reared a large family of eleven children, whose names appear below. Their names are followed by the date on which they drew two hundred acres of land as the children of a Loyalist by order-in-council. The sons were entitled to this land when they reached the age of maturity. The daughters were entitled when they became twenty-one or when married.

The children were:

Son John of Ernesttown, O. C. 26 March, 1817.

Son Simon of Ernesttown, O. C. 20 May, 1817. He married Sarah Diamond, and finally in 1819, settled in Loborough, with their young son, Daniel.

Dau. Rebecca, wife of William Caton of Ernesttown. O. C. 27 June, 1833.

Dau. Catherine, O. C. 27 Feb., 1818.

Dau. Mary, wife of -----Timmerman of Ernesttown. O. C. 27 June, 1833.

Dau. Elizabeth, wife of Jeremiah Storms of Ernesttown. O. C. 30 May, 1834.

Dau. Clarissa, wife of William Storms of Ernesttown. O. C. 18 May, 1833.

Son George of Ernesttown, O. C. 6 Oct., 1831.

Son Jacob of Ernesttown, O. C. 31 May, 1830.

Son Stephen of Ernesttown, O. C. 1 July, 1830

Son Abraham of Kingston, O. C. 1 July, 1830.

Mary, also called Polly, was baptized on 9 May, 1756, by the Rector of Trinity church of Albany, on one of his visits to the Schaghticoke area. She married George Fisher on 1 May, 1774. Their marriage and the baptism of their son, Frederick F., took place in the Dutch Reformed Church of Schaghticoke. George was also a Loyalist soldier in the same regiment as that of his brothers-in-law. He and his wife and family also settled in Canada. Elizabeth, the younger sister, was born about 1761. She married John Young, also a Loyalist, on 10 October, 1779. They also settled in Canada.

I could find no further records of their parents. It is suspected that they remained in New York Province.



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The Department of Chemistry at the University of Chicago is one of the leading centers for research in chemistry in the United States. It is home to a large and diverse group of faculty and students, and is known for its high quality of research and teaching. The department is organized into several divisions, including Organic Chemistry, Inorganic Chemistry, Physical Chemistry, and Analytical Chemistry. Each division has a strong tradition of research and is well-equipped with state-of-the-art facilities. The department also has a strong commitment to education and is home to several graduate and undergraduate programs. For more information about the Department of Chemistry at the University of Chicago, please visit our website at www.uchicago.edu/chem.





